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COREA:

THE HERMIT NATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE COREAN PENINSULA.

COREA, though unknown even by name in Europe until the sixteenth century, was the subject of description by Arab geographers of the middle ages. Before the peninsula was known as a political unit, the envoys of Shinra, one of the three Korean states, and those from Persia met face to face before the throne of China. The Arab merchants trading to Chinese ports crossed the Yellow Sea, visited the peninsula, and even settled there. The youths of Shinra, sent by their sovereign to study the arts of war and peace at Nanking, the mediæval capitol of China, may often have seen and talked with the merchants of Bagdad and Damascus. The Korean term for Mussulmans is *hoi-hoi*, "round and round" men. Korean art shows the undoubted influence of Persia.

A very interesting passage in the chronicles of Japan, while illustrating the sensitive regard of the Japanese for the forms of etiquette, shows another point of contact between Corean and Saracen civilization. It occurs in the *Nihon O Dai Ichi Ran*, or "A View of the Imperial Family of Japan." "In the first month of the sixth year of *Tempiō Shōhō* [February, 754 A.D.], the Japanese nobles *Ohan no Komaro* and *Kibi no Mabi* returned from China, in which country they had left *Fujiwara no Seiga*. The former reported that at the audience which they had of the Emperor *Gen-sho*, on New Year's Day [January 18th], the ambassadors

of Towan [Thibet] occupied the first place to the west, those from Shinra the first place to the east, and that the second place to the west had been destined for them (the Japanese envoys), and the second place to the east for the ambassadors of the Kingdom of Dai Shoku [Persia, then part of the empire of the Caliphs]. Komaro, offended with this arrangement, asked why the Chinese should give precedence over them to the envoys of Shinra, a state which had long been tributary to Japan. The Chinese officials, impressed alike with the firmness and displeasure exhibited by Komaro, assigned to the Japanese envoys a place above those of Persia and to the envoys of Shinra a place above those of Thibet."

Thus the point at issue was settled, by avoiding it, and assigning equal honor to Shinra and Japan.

This incident alone shows that close communications were kept up between the far east and the west of Asia, and that Coreā was known beyond Chinese Asia. At that time the boundaries of the two empires, the Arab and the Chinese, touched each other.

The first notice of Coreā in western books or writings occurs in the works of Khordadbeh, an Arab geographer of the ninth century, in his *Book of Roads and Provinces*. He is thus quoted by Richthofen in his work on China (p. 575, note) :

"What lies on the other side of China is unknown land. But high mountains rise up densely across from Kantu. These lie over in the land of Sila, which is rich in gold. Mussulmans who visit this country often allow themselves, through the advantages of the same, to be induced to settle here. They export from thence ginseng, deerhorn, aloes, camphor, nails, saddles, porcelain, satin, zimmit (cinnamon?) and galanga (ginger?)."

Richthofen rightly argues that Sila is Shinra and Kantu is the promontory province of Shantung. This Arabic term "Sila" is a corruption of Shinra—the predominant state in Coreā at the time of Khordadbeh.

The name of this kingdom was pronounced by the Japanese, Shinra, and by the Chinese, Sinlo—the latter easily altered in Arabic mouths to Sila.

The European name Coreā is derived from the Japanese term Korai (Chinese Kaoli), the name of another state in the peninsula, rival to Shinra. It was also the official title of the nation from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. The Portuguese, who were the first navigators of the Yellow Sea, brought the name to Europe, calling the country Coria, whence the English Coreā.

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The French Jesuits at Peking Gallicized this into Corée. Following the genius of their language, they call it *La Corée*, just as they speak of England as *L'Angleterre*, Germany as *L'Allemande*, and America as *L'Amerique*. Hence has arisen the curious designation, used even by English writers, of this peninsula as "the Corea." But what is good French in this case is very bad English, and we should no more say "the Corea" than "the Germany," "the England," or "the America." English usage forbids the employment of the definite article before a proper name, and those writers who persist in prefixing the definite article to the proper name Corea are either ignorant of the significance of the word, or knowingly violate the laws of the English language. The native name of the country is *Chō-sen* (Morning Calm or Fresh Morning), which French writers, always prodigal in the use of vowels, spell *Tsio-sen*, *Teo-cen*, or *Tchao-sian*. The Chinese call it *Tung kwō* (Eastern Kingdom), and the Manchius, *Sol-ho* or *Solbo*.

The peninsula, with its outlying islands, is nearly equal in size to Minnesota or to Great Britain. Its area is between eighty and ninety thousand square miles. Its coast line measures 1,740 miles. In general shape and relative position to the Asian Continent it resembles Florida. It hangs down between the Middle Kingdom and the Sunrise Land, separating the sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea, between the 34th and 43d parallels of north latitude. In its general configuration, when looked at from the westward on a good map, especially the magnificent one made by the Japanese War Department, *Chō-sen* resembles the outspread wings of a headless butterfly, the lobes of the wings being toward China, and their tops toward Japan.

Legend, tradition, and geological indications lead us to believe that anciently the Chinese promontory and province of Shantung and the Corean peninsula were connected, and that dry land once covered the space filled by the waters joining the Gulf of Pechili and the Yellow Sea. These waters are so shallow that the elevation of their bottoms but a few feet would restore their area to the land surface of the globe. On the other side, also, the sea of Japan is very shallow, and the straits of Corea, at their greatest depth, have but eighty-three feet of water. That portion of the Chinese province of *Shiñg King*, or Southern Manchuria, bordering the sea, is a great plain, or series of flats elevated but a few feet above tide water, which becomes nearly impassable during heavy rains.

A marked difference is noted between the east and west coasts

of the peninsula. The former is comparatively destitute of harbors, and the shore is high, monotonous, and but slightly indented or fringed with islands. It contains but three provinces. On the west coast are five provinces, and the sea is thickly strewn with islands, harbors and landing places, while navigable rivers are more numerous. The "Corean Archipelago" contains an amazing number of fertile and inhabited islands and islets rising out of deep water. They are thus described by the naturalist Arthur Adams:

"Leaving the huge, cone-like island of Quelpaert in the distance, the freshening breeze bears us gallantly toward those unknown islands which form the Archipelago of Korea. As you approach them you look from the deck of the vessel and you see them dotting the wide, blue, boundless plain of the sea—groups and clusters of islands stretching away into the far distance. Far as the eye can reach, their dark masses can be faintly discerned, and as we close, one after another, the bold outlines of their mountain peaks stand out clearly against the cloudless sky. The water from which they seem to arise is so deep around them that a ship can almost range up alongside them. The rough, gray granite and basaltic cliffs, of which they are composed, show them to be only the rugged peaks of submerged mountain masses which have been rent, in some great convulsion of nature, from the peninsula which stretches into the sea from the main land. You gaze upward and see the weird, fantastic outline which some of their torn and riven peaks present. In fact, they have assumed such peculiar forms as to have suggested to navigators characteristic names. Here, for example, stands out the fretted, crumbling towers of one called Windsor Castle, there frowns a noble rock-ruin, the Monastery, and here again, mounting to the skies, the Abbey Peak.

"Some of the islands of this Archipelago are very lofty, and one was ascertained to boast of a naked granite peak more than two thousand feet above the level of the sea. Many of the summits are crowned with a dense forest of conifers, dark trees, very similar in appearance to Scotch firs."

The king of Corea may well be called "Sovereign of Ten Thousand Isles."

Almost the only striking feature of the inland physical geography of Chō-sen, heretofore generally known, is that chain of mountains which traverses the peninsula from North to South, not in a straight line, but in an exceedingly sinuous course, similar to the

tacking of a ship when sailing in the eye of the wind. As the Coreans say, "it winds out and in ninety-nine times."

Striking out from Manchuria it trends eastward to the sea at Cape Bruat on the 41st parallel, thence it strikes southwest about eighty miles to the region west of Broughton's Bay (the narrowest part of Corea), whence it bears westward to the sea at the 37th parallel, or Cape Pelissier, where its angle culminates in the lofty mountain peaks named by the Russians Mount Popoff—after the inventor of the high turret ships. From this point it throws off a fringe of lesser hills to the southward while the main chain strikes southwest, and after forming the boundary between two most southern provinces reaches the sea near the Amherst Isles. Nor does its course end here, for the uncounted islands of the Archipelago, with their fantastic rock-ruins and perennial greenery, that suggest deserted castles and abbeys mantled with ivy, are but the wave-worn and shattered remnants of this lordly range.

This chief feature in the physical geography of the peninsula determines largely its configuration, climate, river system and watershed, political divisions, and natural barriers. Speaking roughly, Eastern Corea is a mountainous ridge of which Western Corea is but the slope.

No river of any importance is found inside the peninsula east of these mountains, except the Nak-tong, which drains the valley formed by the interior and the sea-coast ranges, while on the westward slope ten broad streams collect the tribute of their melted snows to enrich the valleys of five provinces.

Through seven parallels of latitude this range fronts the sea of Japan with a coast barrier which, except at Yung-hing Bay, is nearly destitute of harbors. Its timbered heights present a wall of living green to the mariner sailing from Vladivostok to Shanghai.

Great differences of climate in the same latitude are observed on opposite sides of this mountain range, which has various local epithets. From their height and the permanence of their winter covering, the word "white" forms an oft-recurring part of their names.

The division of the country into eight *dō*, or provinces, which are grouped in southern, central, and northern, is based mainly on the river basins. The rainfall in nearly every province finds an outlet on its own sea-border. Only the western slopes of the two northeastern provinces are exceptions to this rule, since they discharge part of their waters into streams emptying beyond their

boundaries. The Yalu, and the Han—"the river"—are the only streams whose sources lie beyond their own provinces. In rare instances are the rivers known by the same word along their whole length, various local names being applied by the people of different neighborhoods. On the maps in this work only the name most commonly given to each stream near its mouth is printed.

In respect to the sea basins, three provinces on the west coast form one side of the depression called the Yellow Sea Basin, of which Northeastern China forms the opposite rim. The three eastern *dō*, or circuits, lining the Sea of Japan, make the concave in the sea basin to which Japan offers the corresponding edge. The entire northern boundary of the peninsula from sea to gulf, except where the colossal peak Paik-tu ('White Head') forms the water-shed, is one vast valley in which lie the basins of the Yalu and Tumen.

Corea is, in reality, an island, as the following description of White Head Mountain, obtained from the Journal of the Chinese Ambassador to Seoul, shows. This mountain has two summits, one facing north, the other east. On the top is a lake thirty *ri* around. In shape the peak is that of a colossal white vase open to the sky, and fluted or scalloped round the edge like the vases of Chinese porcelain. Its crater, white on the outside, is red, with whitish veins, inside. Snow and ice clothe the sides, sometimes as late as June. On the side of the north, there issues a runnel, a yard in depth, which falls in a cascade and forms the source of the (Tumen) river. Three or four *ri* from the summit of the mountain the stream divides into two parts; one is the source of the Yalu River.

In general, it may be said to dwellers in the temperate zone that the climate of Coreā is excellent, bracing in the north, and in the south tempered by the ocean breezes of summer. The winters in the higher latitudes are not more rigorous than in the State of New York; while, in the most southern, they are as delightful as those in the Carolinas. In so mountainous and sea-girt a country there are, of course, great climatic varieties even in the same provinces.

As compared with European countries of the same latitude, Coreā is much colder in winter and hotter in summer. In the north, the Tumen River is usually frozen during five months in the year. The Han River at Seoul may be crossed on ice during two or three months. Even in the southern provinces, deep snows cover the mountains, though the plains are usually free, rarely

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holding the snow during a whole day. The lowest point to which the mercury fell, in the observation of the French missionaries, was at the 35th parallel of latitude 8° and at the 37th parallel 15° (F.). The most delightful seasons in the year are spring and autumn. In summer, in addition to the great heat, the rain falls often in torrents that blockade the roads and render travelling and transport next to impossible. Toward the end of September occurs the period of tempests and variable winds.

A glance at the fauna of Corea suggests at once India, Europe, Massachusetts, and Florida. In the forests, especially of the two northern circuits, tigers of the largest size and fiercest aspect abound. When food fails them, they attack human habitations, and the annual list of victims is very large. The leopard is common. The wild deer furnishes venison, and the wild hog makes pork cheap everywhere. In the south, monkeys climb the trees, and, occasionally, in troops, damage the farmers' crops. The creature called *a-ke*, or alligator, capable of devouring a man, is sometimes found in the largest rivers, and the salamander abounds in the streams as in Western Japan.

Of domestic beasts, horses are very numerous, being mostly of a short, stunted breed. Immense numbers of oxen are found in the south, furnishing the meat diet craved by the people who eat much more of fatty stuff than the Japanese.

Goats are rare. Sheep are imported from China only for sacrificial purposes. The dog serves for food as well as for companionship and defence. Of birds, the pheasant, falcon, eagle, crane, and stork, are common.

Corea has for centuries successfully carried out the policy of isolation. Instead of a peninsula, her rulers have striven to make her an inaccessible island, and insulate her from the shock of change. She has built not a Great Wall of masonry, but a barrier of sea and river-flood, of mountain and devastated land, of palisades and cordons of armed sentinels. Frost and snow, storm and winter, she hails as her allies. Not content with the sea-border she desolates her shores lest they tempt the mariner to land. Between her Chinese neighbor and herself, she has placed a neutral space of unplanted, unoccupied land. This strip of forests and desolated plains, twenty leagues wide, stretches between Corea and Manchuria. To form it, four cities and many villages were suppressed three centuries ago, and left in ruins. The soil of these solitudes is very good, the roads easy, and the hills not high.

For centuries, only the wild beasts, fugitives from justice, and outlaws from both countries, have inhabited this fertile but forbidden territory. Occasionally, borderers would cultivate portions of it, but gather the produce by night or stealthily by day, venturing on it as prisoners would step over the "dead line." Of late years, the Chinese Government has respected the neutrality of this barrier less and less. One of those recurring historical phenomena peculiar to Manchuria—the increase and pressure of population—has within a generation caused the occupation of large portions of this neutral strip. Parts of it have been surveyed and staked out by Chinese surveyors, and the Korean Government has been too feeble to prevent the occupation. Though no towns or villages are marked on the map of this "No-man's land," yet already, a considerable number of small settlements exist upon it.

As this once neutral territory is being gradually obliterated, so the former lines of palisades and stone walls on the northern border which, two centuries and more ago, were strong, high, guarded and kept in repair, have year by year, during a long era of peace, been suffered to fall into decay. They exist no longer, and should be erased from the maps.

The pressure of population in Manchuria upon the Korean border is a portentous phenomenon. For Manchuria, which for ages past has, like a prolific hive, swarmed off masses of humanity into other lands, seems again preparing to send off a fresh cloud. Already her millions press upon her neighbors for room.

The clock of history seems once more about to strike, perhaps to order again another dynasty on the oft-changed throne of China.

From mysterious Mongolia, have gone out in the past the various hordes called Tartars, or Tatars, Huns, Turks, Kitans, Mongols, Manchus. Perhaps her loins also are already swelling with a new progeny. This marvellous region gave forth the man-children who destroyed the Roman Empire; who extinguished Christianity in Asia and Africa, and nearly in Europe; who, after conquering India and China threatened Christendom, and holding Russia for two centuries, created the largest empire ever known on earth; and finally reared "the most improvable race in Asia" that now holds the throne and empire of China.

Chō-sen since acting the hermit policy of ancient Egypt and mediæval China, has preserved two loopholes at Fusan and Ai-chiu, the former on the sea toward Japan, and the latter in the north-west, on the Chinese border. What in time of peace is a needle's

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eye, is in time of war a flood-gate for enemies. From the west, the invading armies of China have again and again marched around over the Gulf of Liao Tung and entered the peninsula to plunder and to conquer, while Chinese fleets from Shan-tung have over and over again arched their sails in the Yellow Sea to furl them again in Korean Rivers. From the east, the Japanese have pushed across the sea to invade Corea as enemies, to help as allies against China, to levy tribute and go away enriched, or anon to send their grain-laden ships to their starving neighbors.

From a political point of view the geographical position of this country is most unfortunate. Placed between two rival nations, aliens in blood, temper, and policy, Chō-sen has been the rich grist between the upper and nether millstones of China and Japan. Out of the north, rising from the vast plains at Manchuria, the conquering hordes, on their way to the prize lying south of the Great Wall, have over and over again descended on Korean soil to make it their granary. From the pre-historic forays of the tribes beyond the Sungari, to the last new actors on the scene, the Russians, who stand with their feet on the Tumen, looking over the border on her helpless neighbor, Corea has been threatened or devastated by her eager enemies.

Nevertheless Corea has always remained Corea, a separate country; and the people are Coreans, more allied to the Japanese than the Chinese, yet in language, politics, and social customs, different from either. As Ireland is not England or Scotland, neither is Chō-sen China nor Japan.

In her boasted history of "four thousand years," the little kingdom has too often been the Ireland of China, so far as misgovernment on the one side, and fretful and spasmodic resistance on the other, are considered. Yet ancient Corea has also been an Ireland to Japan, in the better sense of giving to her the art, letters, science, and ethics of continental civilization. As of old, went forth from Tara's halls to the British Isles and the continent, the bard and the monk to elevate and civilize Europe with the culture of Rome and the religion of Christianity, so for centuries there crossed the sea from the peninsula a stream of scholars, artists, and missionaries who brought to Japan the social culture of Chō-sen, the literature of China, and the religion of India. A grateful bonze of Japan has well told the story of Corea's part in the civilization of his native country in a book entitled "Precious Jewels from a Neighbor Country."

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Corea fulfils one of the first conditions of national safety in having "scientific frontiers," or adequate natural boundaries of river, mountain, and sea. But now what was once barrier is highway. What was once the safety of isolation, is now the weakness of the recluse. Steam has made the water a surer path than land, and Japan, once the pupil and anon the conqueror of the little kingdom, has in these last days become the helpful friend of Corea's people, and the opener of the long-sealed peninsula.

Already the friendly whistle of Japanese steamers is heard in the harbors of two ports in which are trading settlements. At Fusan and Gensan, the mikado's subjects hold commercial rivalry with the Coreans, and through these two loopholes the hermits of the peninsula catch glimpses of the outer world that must waken thought and create a desire to enter the family of nations. The ill fame of the native character for inhospitality and hatred of foreigners belongs not to the people, nor is truly characteristic of them. It inheres in the government which curses country and people, and in the ruling classes who, like those in Old Japan, do not wish the peasantry to see the inferiority of those who govern them.

Corea cannot long remain a hermit nation. The near future will see her open to the world. Commerce and pure Christianity will enter to elevate her people, and the student of science, ethnology, and language will find a tempting field on which shall be solved many a yet obscure problem. The forbidden land of to-day is, in many striking points of comparison, the analogue of Old Japan. While the last of the hermit nations awaits some gallant Perry of the future, we may hope that the same brilliant path of progress on which the Sunrise Kingdom has entered, awaits the Land of Morning Calm.

We add a postscript. As our manuscript turns to print, we hear of the treaty successfully negotiated by Commodore Shufeldt.



Corean Coin—"Eastern Kingdom, Precious Treasure."